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THE CONDITION OF THE NEGRO IN PHILADELPHIA.<sup>1</sup>

THE sociological study whose results are set forth in Dr. Du Bois's book on the Philadelphia negro had its origin in the desire on the part of a number of men and women of Philadelphia, interested in questions of social reform, for a foundation of definite knowledge on which to base their efforts. This desire culminated in a plan of co-operation between the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia College Settlement, by which each was to furnish a trained investigator, the Department of Finance and Economy at the university undertaking the general supervision of the entire work and the publication of results.

Dr. Du Bois was appointed assistant in sociology at the university for the special purpose of carrying on the work, and Miss Eaton, a graduate of Smith College, was secured as fellow by the College Settlement. Miss Eaton's time was specially devoted to the investigation of the negro in domestic service. The fact that while the negro forms only 12½ per cent. of the population of the United States he performs about 29 per cent. of the domestic service, made it seem desirable that special attention should be given to that form of economic activity.

The book, as a whole, is probably one of the most important contributions we have yet had toward the study of the negro problem in the United States. It is a commonplace to say that any attempt at solving a problem should be preceded by a clear understanding of what the problem involves.

The great value of this particular study lies in the fact that it presents a concrete, definite picture of the family, social, and economic life of a large negro population, in a great northern city. It is based on information gathered together by a man particularly well fitted by intellectual training, tact, and sympathy to reach the facts of the case, to see them in their true proportions, to separate cause from effect, to trace out the action of special environment, and beyond this, to set forth the results of his study in a clear, concise, and scientific manner. As, aside from the work on domestic service, all the investigation was

<sup>1</sup>*The Philadelphia Negro: a Social Study.* By W. E. BRUGHARDT DU BOIS, PH.D. Together with a special report on Domestic Service, by ISABEL EATON, A.M. Published for the University of Pennsylvania. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1899. 8vo, pp. xx + 520. Price \$2.00; cloth \$2.50.

made by one person, Dr. Du Bois himself, the errors in many statistical investigations, arising from a differing personal equation, were eliminated and the results are comparable among themselves.

Philadelphia affords one of the most favorable places for such a study, both on account of the large absolute size of the negro population and on account of the fact that almost all grades of efficiency and social conditions are to be found there. Many of the better class of colored families have been settled in the city for half a century or more, while a still larger per cent. consists of immigrants from the agricultural sections of the South, particularly from Virginia and Maryland. Of all the large cities in the United States only Washington, New Orleans, and Baltimore have as large an absolute negro population as Philadelphia. In 1890 its negro population amounted to 39,371. At the present time it is well into the forty thousands. It is interesting to note that the study of the Philadelphia negro means the study of a group of people as numerous as the population of Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, in 1890, and as large as was Philadelphia itself at the beginning of the century (p. 52). An accurate study of so large a group cannot fail to throw some light on the negro problem as a whole.

The Seventh Ward of Philadelphia, bounded by Spruce and South streets on the north and south, by Seventh street on the east and the Schuylkill River on the west, has within its boundaries about one fourth of the negro population of the city, and, owing to its location and shape, contains all the typical classes. This ward was made the basis of an intensive study, carried on by a house-to-house canvass, supplemented by a less detailed but still careful examination of the negro population of the other wards of the city, and a use of all previous statistical and historical material available for purposes of comparison.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Du Bois recognizes the economic side of the problem as that which presents at the same time the greatest importance and the greatest difficulties. He states the situation on page 97 :

For a group of freedmen the question of economic survival is the most pressing of all questions ; the problem as to how, under the circumstances of modern life, any group of people can earn a decent living, so as to maintain their standard of life, it is not always easy to answer. But when the question

<sup>1</sup> For details of scope and method of problem see first eight pages of the work, The schedules used are printed in Appendix A, pp. 400 *et seq.*



We can grasp the true meaning of these figures only by comparing the distribution of occupations among the negroes with that of the total population of the city; for this purpose we must redistribute the occupations according to the simpler, but in many respects unsatisfactory divisions of the United States Census. We then have (p. 108):

	Whole population of Philadelphia, 1890		Negroes of Seventh ward, 1896	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Total population over 10 - - - - -	847,283		8,463	
Number in gainful occupations - - - - -	466,791		6,611	
Per cent. in gainful occupations - - - - -		55.1		78
Engaged in agriculture - - - - -	6,497	1.5	11	.2
Engaged in professional service - - - - -	19,438	4.2	130*	2.0
Engaged in domestic and personal service - - - - -	106,129	22.7	4,889	74.3
Engaged in trade and transportation - - - - -	115,462	24.7	1,006	15.3
Engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries	219,265	46.9	541	8.2

\*Omitting 24 students 21 years of age and over.

A comparison of these statistics shows a percentage very much greater than that of the general average for the city of those engaged in gainful occupations. It is what was to be anticipated. According to Dr. Du Bois it indicates an absence of accumulated wealth, arising from poverty and low wages. The causes of poverty are largely historical in character. Low wages are explained when we consider the few occupations to which the negroes are limited and the great competition that ensues.

This is true among the men and especially true among the women, where the limitation is greatest. All the forces that are impelling white women to become bread-winners are emphasized in the case of negro women; their chances of marriage are decreased by the low wages of the men and the large excess of their own sex in the great cities;<sup>1</sup> they must work, and if there are few chances open they must suffer from competition in wages. Among the men low wages means either enforced celibacy or irregular and often dissipated lives, or homes where the wife and mother must also be a bread-winner. . . . 16.3 per cent. of the native white women of native parents and of all ages, in Philadelphia, are bread-winners; their occupations

<sup>1</sup> In Philadelphia there are 1383 females to every 1000 males. The excess is largely explained by the fact that from the beginning opportunities for women in large cities have been greater than those for men through their large employment in domestic service (p. 54).

are restricted, and there is great competition; yet among negro women, where the restriction in occupation reaches its greatest limit, nevertheless 43 per cent. are bread-winners, and their wages are at the lowest point in all cases save in some lines of domestic service where custom holds them at certain figures; even here, however, the tendency is downward (pp. 110, 111).

The causes which limit the occupations of the negro are twofold—first the inefficiency which comes from lack of experience and training, and second, the prejudice of the whites.

On the first point Dr. Du Bois says (pp. 133, 134) :

The most noticeable thing about the negro laborers as a whole is their uneven quality. There are some first-class, capable and willing workers, who have held their positions for years and give perfect satisfaction. On the other hand, there are numbers of inefficient and unintelligent laborers, on whom employers cannot rely and who are below average American labor in ability. This unevenness arises from two causes: the different training of the various groups of negroes comprising the city population; some are descendants of generations of free negroes; some of trained house-servants, long in close contact with their masters' families; others are the sons of field-hands, untouched and untrained by contact with civilized institutions; all this vast difference in preparation shows vast differences in results. The second reason lies in the increased competition within the group, and the growing lack of incentive to good work, owing to the difficulty of escaping from manual toil into higher and better paid callings; the higher classes of white labor are continually being incorporated into the skilled trades, or clerical workers, or other higher grades of labor. Sometimes this happens with negroes, but not often. The first-class ditcher can seldom become foreman of a gang; the hod-carrier can seldom become a mason; the porter cannot have much hope of being a clerk, or the elevator boy of becoming a salesman. Consequently we find the ranks of the laborers among negroes filled to an unusual extent with disappointed men, with men who have lost the incentive to excel, and have become chronic grumblers and complainers, spreading this spirit further than it would naturally go. At the same time this shutting off the natural outlet for ability means an increase of competition for ordinary work.

Again the action of the trades unions, which, with few exceptions, practically exclude negroes from membership, has shut them out of occupations for which many of them are well fitted. In the middle of the century a considerably larger number were engaged in Philadelphia in such trades as carpentering, masonry, and plastering. The exclusion is maintained in some cases by the insertion of the word "white"

among the qualifications for membership. More often there is no general rule, local bodies being left to their own discretion in the matter. This means that where negro labor is competent and a considerable factor as to quantity, as in western Pennsylvania among miners and iron-workers, they are not only allowed, but solicited, to join the unions. Where they are few in number and comparatively inefficient, it is impossible for even a skilled workman to gain admission. In Philadelphia they are well represented in the cigar-makers union.

The carpenters, masons, painters, iron-workers, etc., have succeeded in keeping out nearly all negro workmen by simply declining to work with non-union men and refusing to let colored men join the union (p. 128).

This refusal is not so much a matter of class prejudice as it is the grasping and keeping of an economic advantage.

Class prejudice is, however, one of the chief causes which prevent the negro from acquiring experience and from gaining in efficiency by doing. It is shown by the investigation that, as a rule, it is difficult for a negro family, no matter how respectable, to rent a house on a good residence street, in a respectable neighborhood occupied chiefly by whites. As a result of this discrimination in the matter of renting at fair rates, the negro is restricted to certain portions of the city inhabited chiefly by his own race, or by the lowest of the foreign white population. All the incentive that would come from living beside people whose standard of life is possibly higher than his own is lost. Imitation, which sociologists have shown to be so powerful a force in molding a civilization, has a limited opportunity in which to work. This herding together results, in turn, in an identification, in popular opinion, of the better element of the mass with the less efficient and criminal element, a lack of discrimination which removes one of the most powerful incentives to rise.

The delicate question of class prejudice is treated by Dr. Du Bois with great restraint and impartiality. The tone is not that of a reformer pleading for justice against a great wrong, but that of the scientific investigator who looks at things as they are and states what he sees without praise or blame.

He acknowledges that most negroes

regard this prejudice as the chief cause of their present unfortunate condition. On the other hand, most white people are quite unconscious of any such powerful and vindictive feeling; they regard color prejudice as the easily explicable feeling that intimate social intercourse with a lower race is

not only undesirable but impracticable if our present standards of culture are to be maintained (p. 322).

The truth Dr. Du Bois believes to lie between these two extremes. The practical results of such prejudice as exists today in Philadelphia he finds to be on the economic side (pp. 323, 324).

1. As to getting work :

No matter how well trained a negro may be, or how fitted for work of any kind, he cannot in the ordinary course of competition hope to be much more than a menial servant.

He cannot get clerical or supervisory work to do save in exceptional cases.

He cannot teach save in a few of the remaining negro schools.

He cannot become a mechanic except for small transient jobs, and cannot join a trades union.

A negro woman has but three careers open to her in this city : domestic service, sewing, or married life.

2. As to keeping work :

The negro suffers in competition more severely than white men.

Change in fashion is causing him to be replaced by whites in the better paid positions of domestic service.

Whim and accident will cause him to lose a hard-earned place more quickly than the same things would affect a white man.

Being few in number compared with the whites, the crime or carelessness of a few of his race is easily imputed to all, and the reputation of the good, industrious, and reliable suffers thereby.

Because negro workmen may not often work side by side with white workmen, the individual black workman is rated, not by his own efficiency, but by the efficiency of a whole group of black fellow workmen, which may often be low.

Because of these difficulties which virtually increase competition in his case he is forced to take lower wages for the same work than white workmen.

3. As to entering new lines of work :

Men are used to seeing negroes in inferior positions ; when, therefore, by any chance a negro gets in a better position, most men immediately conclude that he is not fitted for it, even before he has a chance to show his fitness.

If, therefore, he set up a store, men will not patronize him.

If he is put into public position men will complain.

If he gain a position in the commercial world, men will quietly secure his dismissal or see that a white man succeeds him.

4. As to his expenditure :



The comparative smallness of the patronage of the negro, and the dislike of other customers, makes it usual to increase the charges or difficulties in certain directions in which a negro must spend money.

He must pay more house rent for worse houses than most white people pay. He is sometimes liable to insult or reluctant service in some restaurants, hotels and stores, at public resorts, theaters and places of recreation; and at nearly all barber shops.

5. As to his children :

The negro finds it extremely difficult to rear children in such an atmosphere and not have them either cringing or impudent ; if he impresses upon them patience with their lot, they may grow up satisfied with their condition ; if he inspires them with ambition to rise, they may grow to despise their own people, hate the whites, and become embittered with the world.

In such economic conditions what are the incomes a negro may hope to win, and does he ever succeed in accumulating property ?

Exact data with regard to incomes were very difficult to obtain, and the result must be regarded simply as careful estimates. Considering a family of five as the unit, Dr. Du Bois reaches the conclusion that about 19 per cent. of the negro families in the Seventh Ward earn \$5 and less per week on the average ; 48 per cent. earn between \$5 and \$10 ; 26 per cent. \$10 to \$15 ; and 8 per cent. over \$15 per week. They are thus divided roughly into four groups : first, the "very poor and poor ;" second, "fair ;" third, "comfortable ;" and fourth, "in good circumstances." As Dr. Du Bois notes, the whole division into "poor," "comfortable," and "well-to-do," depends primarily on the standard of living among a people. An examination into typical family budgets in each class shows one feature common to all. It is commented upon as follows (p. 178) :

Probably few poor nations waste more money by thoughtless and unreasonable expenditure than the American negro, and especially those living in large cities like Philadelphia. First, they waste much money in poor food and in unhealthful methods of cooking. The meat bill of the average negro family would surprise a French or German peasant, or even an Englishman. The crowds that line Lombard street on Sundays are dressed far beyond their means ; much money is wasted in extravagantly furnished parlors, dining rooms, guest chambers, and other visible parts of the homes. Thousands of dollars are annually wasted in excessive rents, in doubtful "societies" of all kinds and descriptions, in amusements of various kinds, and in miscellaneous ornaments and gewgaws.

This living up to or in excess of income naturally prevents any accumulation of property. Nevertheless there are exceptions. From the best evidence available it appears that

One hundred and twenty three of the 2441 families in the Seventh Ward, or 5.3 per cent., own property in the ward; 75 other families own property outside the ward, making in all 197, or 8 per cent. of the families who are property holders. It is possible that omissions may raise this total to 10 per cent. The total value of this property is partly conjectural, but a careful estimate would place it at about one million dollars, or  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of a ward where the negroes form 42 per cent. of the population (p 179).

A prominent colored citizen of Philadelphia once said in a public address, that the course of Philadelphians toward the negroes, in making every effort to give them an education and then shutting them out of every better avenue of industry was much like that of an engineer who gets up steam in his boilers and then sits on the safety valve. Dr. Du Bois's investigation of the educational facilities of Philadelphia show that in that city, at least, it is quite possible for a negro boy to pass from the lowest primary grade through the high school and into the university. Very few, however, can or do take advantage of this possibility. Still the question of education, in its ordinary sense, *i. e.*, the passing through school and college, is not the most pressing question at this time. "To educate boys and girls and then to refuse them work is to train loafers and rogues" (p. 354).

The serious obstacle to progress at the present has arisen through lack of opportunity, unrewarded merit, and unsatisfied ambition. These have created a social environment very dangerous to the growing boy and girl.

For thirty years and more Philadelphia has said to its black children: "Honesty, efficiency, and talent have little to do with your success; if you work hard, spend little, and are good you may earn your bread and butter at these sorts of work which we frankly confess we despise; if you are dishonest and lazy, the state will furnish you bread free." Thus the class of negroes which the prejudices of the city have distinctly encouraged is that of the criminal, the lazy, and the shiftless; for them the city teems with institutions and charities; for them there is succor and sympathy; for them Philadelphians are thinking and planning; but for the educated and industrious young colored man who wants work and not platitudes, wages and not alms, just rewards and not sermons; for such colored men Philadelphia apparently has no use (pp. 351, 352).

So much space has been given to an attempt to show something of Dr. Du Bois's conclusions respecting occupations and causes affecting their limitation, that it is only possible to mention the chapters on Health; the Family Life; Organized Life, including charities, secret and benefit societies, and co-operative business; the Negro Criminal; the Environment of the Negro, *i. e.*, section and ward, housing, social classes and amusements; the Contract of the Races, including the question of intermarriage, and Negro Suffrage.

In the short final chapter Dr. Du Bois allows himself a word as to "the meaning of all this." The negro problem seems to be bewilderingly complicated, nevertheless it is not more hopelessly complex than many others have been which have been solved by time. The possible solution offered in the gradual dying out of the race is rejected.

A nation that has endured the slave trade, slavery, reconstruction, and present prejudice three hundred years, and under it increased in numbers and efficiency, is not in any immediate danger of extinction. Nor is the thought of voluntary or involuntary emigration more than a dream of men who forget that there are half as many negroes in the United States as Spaniards in Spain. If this be so, a few plain propositions may be laid down as axiomatic:

1. The negro is here to stay.
2. It is to the advantage of all, both black and white, that every negro should make the best of himself.
3. It is the duty of the negro to raise himself by every effort to the standards of modern civilization and not to lower these standards in any degree.
4. It is the duty of the white people to guard their civilization against debauchment by themselves or others; but in order to do this it is not necessary to hinder and retard the efforts of an earnest people to rise, simply because they lack faith in the ability of that people.
5. With these duties in mind and with a spirit of self-help, mutual aid and co-operation, the two races should strive side by side to realize the ideals of the republic and make this truly a land of equal opportunity for all men (pp. 388, 389).

In the *Special Report on Negro Domestic Service* (pp. 427-509), Miss Eaton points out the importance of the study in the light not only of its relation to the negro problem but to the vexed question of domestic service in general. The colored population of the United States

Perform about three times as much domestic service in proportion to their numbers as the whites do. From this it will be seen that while the study of domestic service in any consideration of the condition of the colored people is important, the study of the negro domestic is equally important in any careful consideration of the domestic service problem (p. 433).

The returns of the last census show that very nearly 60 per cent. of the colored working men of Pennsylvania are engaged in domestic service, while over 91 per cent. of the colored working women of the state are in service (p. 428). This proportion is greater than that found in the Seventh Ward, but in the census classes of persons are included which are scheduled elsewhere in this report.

The great source of supply of Philadelphia's domestic service comes from Maryland and Virginia, these two states contributing 48.2 per cent. of the total. An investigation as to the age of domestic servants shows that nearly one half the colored domestics of Philadelphia, both men and women, are included in the age period between twenty-one and thirty years.

The chapter on grades of service brings out facts of considerable interest. It shows that men in domestic service receive close upon 100 per cent. more wages than women. There is greater equality, however, between the wages of white and colored women than between that of white and colored men. The results of the investigation seem to show that color makes little difference in the former case while in the case of men, in the higher grades of service at least, the whites receive a considerably larger wage. This is largely owing to fashion, since the English butler, coachman, etc., are at present the proper thing. The supply being more limited, the pay rises.

The following table explains why Englishmen, accustomed to domestic service at home, are attracted to the United States.

An absolute money wage, in many cases 100 per cent. greater, is a strong attraction to emigration.

TABLE X (p. 452).

## TABLE COMPARING ENGLISH AND AMERICAN "MONEY WAGES."

(Annual amounts over and above board and lodging.)

Sub-occupations		London <sup>1</sup>	Colored domestics in Philadelphia	United States	Philadelphia
Women	{ General servant - - -	\$ 77.50	\$168.48	Aver. women's wgs	Ave. women's wgs
	{ House maid - - - -	82.50	164.84		
	{ Cook - - - - -	109.50	209.04		
Men	{ Errand boy - - -	55.00	135.72	Average men's wages	Aver. colored men's wages
	{ Footman, coachman - -	175.00	446.16		
	{ Butler { colored - - -		{ 428.48		
	{ white - - - -	300.00	{ 540.00		

<sup>1</sup> CHARLES BOOTH, *Life and Labor of the People*, vol. viii. pp. 217, 223.<sup>2</sup> SALMON, *Domestic Service*, p. 28.

On page 453 the question of the effect of board and lodging on wages is considered. Miss Eaton says :

In the Philadelphia investigation the facts upon this point seem to indicate that the amount of wages is only slightly affected, if at all, by the question of board and lodging. When these are given in addition to wages they apparently do not stand, in the mind of either employer or domestic, as part payment for service. A comparison of the pay of women cooks, who lodge at their place of work, with that of women cooks who lodge at home, will illustrate this. The average pay of those who lodge at their place of work, and therefore receive board and lodging in addition to wages, is \$4.13, as contrasted with \$3.95 received by those who go home at night. Here the difference will be seen to be in the opposite direction from what we should expect if board and lodging are included as part of the wages of cooks. The same facts hold good for the other sub-occupations among colored domestic servants in the ward.

A comparison of wages of colored domestics with the wages of those in other occupations, shows that for the women it is one of the well-paid employments. This is true not only of colored but white domestics, as the investigation of Miss Salmon into the comparative savings of domestics, public-school teachers, and factory operators shows.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter on savings and expenditure brings out the interesting fact that, as a rule, in spite of their much larger wages, the men domestics do much less than the women toward the support of dependents. The per cent. of those who save is about the same in both sexes. The figures must be taken with considerable allowance, but with the best results attainable there were only about 15 per cent. in both sexes who saved nothing at all. The men, as a rule, prefer to deposit their savings in savings banks, while there seems to be a rather general distrust of banks on the part of the women. They prefer "societies," or saving at home.

Other chapters treat of Amusements and Recreations, Length and Quality of Domestic Service and Conjugal Conditions, Illiteracy and Health.

"In view of the general purpose of the investigation," Miss Eaton considers, in the last chapter, ideals of betterment in Philadelphia Negro Domestic Service, which she believes to be no different from the "ideals" of domestic service as a whole. "When the domestic

<sup>1</sup> L. M. SALMON, *Domestic Service*, p. 446.

becomes a 'trained worker, honorable and dignified,''' the great objection now felt in the loss of social standing and in the personal relations between employers and employee will be met.

Miss Eaton's report is valuable for the light it throws on an important side of the negro problem, but it may not be amiss to point out that it is perhaps of still broader social worth in being the third scientific attempt<sup>1</sup> to find a basis of fact for the study of domestic service in general.

KATHARINE BEMENT DAVIS.

<sup>1</sup> The two previous studies are CHARLES BOOTH's *Life and Labor of the People* vol. viii., and MISS SALMON'S *Domestic Service*.